



CHOICE NEIGHBORHOODS

Improving academic achievement and educational opportunities for low-income children and youth in the Yesler Neighborhood

The Challenge

There are 380 children/youth living in the public housing community of Yesler Terrace and attending a Seattle public school. Of the households these children are a part of, 75 percent are at or below the poverty line. Based on data from the school district, these children's test scores are significantly below the school district's average rate for passing standardized math and reading tests at every grade level from grades three through eight.

The high school graduation rate for youth in this group is just 74 percent. Compounding these challenges is the fact that the neighborhood elementary school, Bailey Gatzert, is a very low-performing school. In 2009-2010 Bailey Gatzert's test scores indicated that just 40 percent of third- to fifth-grade students were proficient on the state reading test, and only 36 percent were proficient on the state math test.

Many of these children and youth come from immigrant families, with the most prevalent group being from Somalia. The majority of parents from this war-ravaged country have no formal education themselves. These parents find the American school system and the academic support programs available to their children a challenge to navigate.

Current Response – Theory of Change

Motivated by the belief that success in education is the best pathway out of poverty for low-income children and youth, Seattle Housing Authority is committed to improving the academic achievement of students living at Yesler Terrace and in the adjacent Yesler neighborhood. In order to achieve this goal, we are partnering with local institutions and nonprofits to create a cradle-through-college pipeline of learning resources for children and youth that must result in significantly improved high school and college graduation rates if we are to succeed.

Our key partners include: Seattle University, Seattle Public Schools, the City's Office of Education and several nonprofits, including United Way, Neighborhood House, Catholic Community Services and the College Success Foundation. Seattle University has made a long-term commitment and has developed a plan to significantly improve the academic achievement of all students attending Bailey Gatzert and the middle and high schools these elementary students will eventually attend. For this reason, Seattle University is our lead partner.

Working with SU and our other partners, we are implementing a coordinated approach to ensure low-income children in the Yesler neighborhood have access to early learning programs, tutoring, summer academic enrichment programs, college preparation

mentoring and scholarships. These resources are meant to complement the learning that happens in the classroom. Success will be measured annually based on many data points including passing standardized math and reading tests in grades three through eight and high school graduation rates. Our efforts in these areas will translate into tracking how individual students from the Yesler neighborhood enrolled in the above support programs perform on the standardized tests and other indicators. Therefore, our theory of change is that through this coordinated, placed-based pipeline of academic supports which complements classroom teaching, students will meet the academic performance standards we have established with our partners.

Utilizing Federal and Local Resources

The Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) recently awarded Seattle Housing a Choice Neighborhood grant. With this grant we are launching the redevelopment of the Yesler Terrace public housing community and the revitalization of the adjacent neighborhood. As one of five national grantees, HUD will closely monitor our success in improving academic achievement. Over the five year grant period, we will invest the funding in the following programming: early learning for parents and children involving literacy materials and skills; summer academic enrichment programming for students behind in their grade level or transitioning to a new school; college preparatory advising and mentoring for middle and high school students; and, family engagement.

Part of our family engagement efforts will involve working with low-income families to help them develop education plans, track individual student progress, and access needed academic support services. Parents will be provided with guidance in engaging directly with their child's school and teacher. They will also be recruited to school and community events focused on promoting the academic progress of youth through school-day learning, expanded-day learning and summer activities. Family engagement staff will help build bridges between parents and school and program staff in order to develop cultural understanding and trust. Such trust and understanding can result in the transformation of relationships so critical to change.

Seattle Housing Authority is strategically investing the Choice Neighborhood resources in the programming areas above so that that they will complement and align with local investments from the City's Family and Education Levy, the school district, and local private funding given to Seattle University and Seattle Housing Authority. We also recognize that children often come to school with social issues that impact their academic success. Academic support programs are not able to effectively help children and their families address these issues. For this reason, the housing authority and Seattle University are also working with social service providers and the Seattle Police Department to support children and their families in addressing issues that are not academic in nature, but which can impact academic success.